

Chapter Fifteen

INTRODUCING SOCIALIST REALISM IN HUNGARY, 1945–51: HOW POLITICS MADE AESTHETICS

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In the national elections that took place in Hungary in November 1945, the Hungarian Communist Party (HCP) was in for a surprise: it lost. It lost, even though its leaders, most of whom had returned home after a prolonged stay in the Soviet Union, were convinced that they would easily score a victory over their political rivals.¹ But it was not meant to be, and the HCP had to prepare for a longer struggle for the establishment of socialism than it had hoped. This chapter looks at the repercussions of this failure on the Hungarian cultural and, more specifically, literary sphere, which came to be characterized in the late 1940s by quite a strong tension between two opposing tendencies. On the one hand, it was managed by communist authorities (partly from Moscow), but on the other, it was to remain open to a multiplicity of approaches, opinions and creative methods so as to ensure at least an illusion of democracy both for the benefit of Western neighbours and for some of the local intellectuals. The Hungarian case offers an intriguing example of how socialist realism could be introduced in an atmosphere of supposed pluralism. Of particular interest in this context is the figure of György Lukács (1885–1971) who at the time, as the analysis below will show, played a key role in outlining the theoretical and practical framework for many of the strategic decisions related to the development of the cultural sphere in Hungary. Lukács's assistance in this process deserves particular attention, for it reveals that the philosopher fulfilled rather different roles in the various countries he was living in. While in the Soviet Union he embodied in many respects a reflective Marxist alternative to inflexible dogmatism, in post-war Hungary he greatly contributed to a hegemonic cultural politics that seriously restricted, sometimes by coercive measures, cultural exchange.

‘Freedom to Writers!’

As one might expect, in the spring of 1945 cultural life in Hungary was far from vibrant. Accordingly, at the initial stage, cultural issues were considered by the HCP to be secondary to more significant affairs in the political arena. Those few top cadres who were competent in matters of culture were assigned other duties with more direct political impact, and even though one could speak of something like a general trend in the HCP's

cultural policy of the time, it is worth remembering that Hungarian communists coming from various backgrounds often held quite different opinions on cultural issues, especially those of them in the lower ranks. Following Stalin's advice,² the leadership of the HCP sought to establish a relatively wide coalition of intellectual elites that would signal pluralism towards the outside, present the HCP as a moderate political force for voters and not deter potential intellectual allies. However, just as they discussed politics in terms of tactics and manipulation, the Party leadership increasingly revealed that they wished to consolidate the numerous cultural groups and movements around a single principle in the field of culture as well.

In the tumultuous times of the post-war months, writers often took a reserved stand. Many were uncomfortable with the fact that the cultural scene was being built on an unequivocally political basis: politicians of various affiliations assigned larger cinemas, theatres, publishing houses and bookstores to certain parties, depending on the needs of the moment. When it came to literature, no other party was as set on enforcing its demands as the HCP. Both its official daily, *Szabad Nép* (*Free People*), and another that was also practically dominated by the communists, *Szabadság* (*Freedom*), insisted that writers should break their silence and express their support of the 'new democracy' by engaging in politics and renouncing their creative philosophy of *l'art pour l'art*.³ Unsurprisingly, this pressure provoked objections among artists with the most varied sociocultural backgrounds, but most of all among the leftist and liberal urban intelligentsia.

One of the most outspoken representatives of such adherents of creative freedom was Jenő Heltai (1871–1957), who had survived Nazi persecution in hiding and after the war was elected president of the Union of Hungarian Playwrights. Heltai repeatedly protested any attempts by politicians to prescribe any agenda to writers, or to force them to publicly take sides in political conflicts. He saw this as a threat to the creative independence of authors and to the whole literary field. 'Freedom to writers!' he cried out in June 1945.⁴ In his opinion, writers simply needed time to find their ways of expressing the 'new world'; he linked the pursuit of original artistic forms to the personal, 'organic' development of a writer. Heltai's statements did not go unnoticed, and the communist press took every chance to rail against such views. However, its primary target was the younger Sándor Márai (1900–1989), one of the most widely read and respected living writers in post-war Hungary. Márai could be characterized as a somewhat disillusioned humanist who, nevertheless, assigned to the intelligentsia the moral task of maintaining its spiritual and intellectual integrity even in the maelstrom of twentieth-century humanitarian catastrophes. Márai was sharply criticized for his 'bourgeois individualism' by Márton Horváth (1906–1987), the editor-in-chief of *Szabad Nép* and a member of the HCP's Central Committee.⁵ Many young anti-fascist urban intellectuals who held artistic integrity in high esteem were also targeted. For example, the emerging poet György Somlyó (1920–2006) became involved in a controversy with no less an authority than Lukács himself. Somlyó shared Heltai's deep concerns about sacrificing personal autonomy on the altar of community; he nostalgically recalled Lukács' earlier writings as he contrasted them to the 'new' Lukács.⁶

Despite these rather insistent voices that signalled a strong commitment to individual freedom, the view that the art of the new democracy should be 'collectivist' was shared

by many on the political left. But there was absolutely no consensus on the meaning of the term, not even within the HCP. On the one hand, the Stalinist party elite was convinced that the collective, that is the Hungarian people (*nép*), was represented exclusively by the HCP, and therefore the Party was entitled to closely supervise and guide artists. On the other hand, however, a wide variety of avant-gardist and Proletkult ideas were circulating among members and sympathizers who did not necessarily associate collectivist art with centralization. As reported by Ferenc Szendrő, the secretary of the Worker's Cultural Alliance (Munkás Kultúrszövetség), after a meeting of communist artists in June 1945 there was a sharp disagreement concerning whether the freedom of artists could, or should, be limited by the Party or not: some communists feared politicians 'want[ed] to force the Party line on art'.⁷

Such tensions were noticeable in the Party press as well. For instance, *Szabad Nép* initially took a favourable view of a staging of Ernst Toller's *Die Maschinenstürmer* (*The Machine Wreckers*, 1922) in the tradition of amateur workers' theatre,⁸ but soon after that the same organ corrected itself by publishing critical reviews disapproving of such attempts, so as to prevent further initiatives of this kind, which were labelled 'leftist inclinations'.⁹ When theatre director Béla Both, who was responsible for staging this expressionist play, and the painter János Kmetty complained to editor Márton Horváth that the Party daily's attacks against avant-garde art were exaggerated, the latter admitted that the critical reactions, including the critical remarks coming from himself, were indeed not justified from a professional point of view and were, in fact, rather 'superficial'.¹⁰ This response, however, meant nothing more than paying lip service to the spirit of intellectual freedom, since Horváth at the same time continued to insist that the Party's critical view of the avant-garde represented the point of view of 'the people' and left no doubt as to art being considered by the Party as little more than an instrument of politics.

The Politics of 'Doublespeak'

The main architect of communist cultural policy was, of course, not Horváth, but József Révai (1898–1959), who during his Moscow exile in the 1930s had already outlined a Hungarian version of national Bolshevism. In doing so he relied extensively on the work of Lukács, who returned from the Soviet Union shortly after Révai and resettled in Budapest in late August 1945. Since Révai supervised several areas in domestic politics, it was Lukács who took over a leading role in the press campaign against bourgeois culture, a role he played until around the turn of 1948–49.¹¹ Despite the many similarities between their positions in the 1930s and the 1940s, the primary difference between the two was that Lukács usually tried to embed Hungarian works he happened to analyse in a broader setting of pan-European cultural history, while Révai barely referred to foreign literary figures or trends and tried to understand the history of Hungarian literature from within. This difference was to become decisive in 1949, when positive references to any Western philosophical and cultural achievement became suspect in Hungary, but in the mid-1940s it did not have that much significance. At that time, Révai and Lukács were still rather close allies. This is important to stress here because later, in the so-called Lukács debate in 1949–50, Révai retrospectively revised both his own and

Lukács's position and misrepresented them as being fundamentally divergent during the entire period between 1945 and 1948.¹²

At that time, though, just like Révai and Horváth, Lukács maintained that a centralization of the cultural field was inevitable. His views on this point were consistent over the years, and he was a primary advocate of the nationalization of publishing houses and the introduction of censorship. He realized early that differences within the HCP might prove a serious obstacle to the Party's political objectives, which meant that the primary step should be a homogenization of intellectual agendas within the Party. The Party Committee on Intellectual Issues was set up in spring 1946 with the aim of drawing up a comprehensive programme regulating the relationship between the HCP and intellectuals and professionals. At a meeting of this committee, Lukács voiced the opinion that the communication of the Party with intellectuals and professionals required a carefully designed set of guidelines, and that intellectual and creative activities in various fields had to be supervised by a central body.¹³ These fields naturally included those of art, literature and criticism, although questions of culture were not addressed directly at this meeting, the purpose of which was to set the overall strategy and tactics of communication with the intelligentsia in general. The explicit goal of this strategy was the introduction of socialism in Hungary. Since socialism could not be introduced directly in the current political circumstances, well-coordinated tactics were considered to be essential for achieving the desired result. The central body proposed by Lukács was to supervise the way Party members conveyed their messages in the public sphere. To this end, a complex structure of boards and referees that were to be responsible for specific fields such as art, medicine or engineering, was to be set up.

There were several challenges the Party elite had to face, though, and some of these came from the practice of 'doublespeak', a central element of the tactics of the HCP itself. The communist leadership considered it essential to ease the intellectuals' anxiety, caused primarily by the politically motivated layoffs in the public sector and the fear that a Soviet-type dictatorship was going to be introduced, but at the same time, it was important to preserve the loyalty of those who called for a more radical break with the past and were often receptive to the propaganda of Social Democrats, campaigning for their own version of socialism with more radical political slogans.¹⁴ Therefore, HCP propaganda was designed to deliver different, sometimes conflicting messages to various types of audiences. Party members were instructed to avoid certain political keywords; for example, they were encouraged not to refer to 'socialism' as the final goal of the social changes, and the term 'dictatorship of the proletariat' was also to be avoided.¹⁵ Talking to the wider public, they tried not to stress that 'democracy' in their understanding was not linked to pluralism and that it might involve mass coercion in the spirit of Lenin. However, none of this was a secret to an attentive and informed reader of the Party daily. These tactics had already been employed in 1945, though with much less rigor and without the ideological underpinning provided by Lukács at the committee meeting mentioned above.

Lukács came up with a solution that would allow avoiding both leftist and rightist inclinations and that was based on the teachings of Lenin as interpreted by Stalin in his *Foundations of Leninism*. In this view, socialism was to be perceived as the final, absolute

aim of the society, but in order to achieve it, one had to be sensitive to the needs of the moment, to the rhythm of the time, sometimes retreating in order to be able to advance in a more efficient manner, with more productive results.¹⁶ This exercise of self-restraint in political rhetoric had its parallel in the cultural sphere which, for any Leninist, had to be completely politicized. One of the first notable mentions of socialist realism as the artistic method of the future was in the first public speech Lukács gave just two weeks after his return to Hungary in September 1945.¹⁷ It is remarkable, however, that he avoided using the term again with direct reference to *Hungarian* literature until mid-1948, after the HCP merged with the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the creation of a one-party system was under way.

In my view, there are multiple reasons to be considered here. One is that Lukács imagined the recreation of Hungarian culture not as a mechanical imitation of the contemporary Soviet model. Rather, as I will argue below, he reached back to the mid-1930s, when he had provided a philosophically informed underpinning of socialist realist aesthetics in the Soviet Union. While one may endorse Tyrus Miller's urge not to dismiss the post-war Lukács as simply a dogmatic Stalinist and spare the effort to engage with his work in the period, it is equally important to remember that Stalinism itself had its own various phases and interpretations. It could be argued that Lukács internalized a variant that was not identical to the one given prominence in the Soviet Union after the 1947 peace treaties. His main concern, I believe, was to find domestic roots for a new Hungarian culture, to rediscover its hidden, intentionally veiled, suppressed 'logic', an undercurrent tradition that would blossom in the new political-economic environment. This tradition had to be integrated into the wider framework of 'great realism' that for Lukács found its highest manifestation in Gorky and socialist realism. Though he did not completely conceal this, neither did he emphasize it, which is no surprise, given that Soviet representatives of cultural policy had viewed his Marxism since the late 1930s as suspiciously 'cosmopolitan'. He clearly identified Gorky as the main representative of socialist realism,¹⁸ but he still refrained from using the term 'socialist realism' in his longer essays, partly because he wanted to prevent his words being used as pretext for giving credit to those Soviet-Hungarian writers who felt they were its true ambassadors. Lukács maintained that these formerly Moscow-based émigré writers (such as Sándor Gergely or Béla Illés) should not be embraced as the central figures of the Hungarian literary canon, but rather that a new socialist realist literature should develop from within the country. This is one reason why he preferred to use the phrase 'contemporary Russian literature' and its variants rather than 'socialist realism' when referring to Soviet writers of the time.¹⁹

Lukács's approach, however, fit perfectly into the communicative tactics employed by the Party leadership, tactics that the philosopher made explicit at the committee meeting discussed above. The mainstream communist press avoided revealing that socialism was the final objective, and likewise with regard to its correspondent aesthetics, socialist realism. It was not only Lukács who abandoned the term; it was practically absent also from the vocabulary of *Szabad Nép* and the HCP's ideological journal, *Társadalmi Szemle* (*Social Review*) until as late as 1948–49. Notably, when it was rarely used, it occurred with reference to the fine arts or film, but almost never to literature. It was Lukács who provided

the first detailed introduction to the ideals of socialist realist literature in the Party daily, writing on the tenth anniversary of Gorky's death.²⁰ Gorky is omnipresent in Lukács's essays and articles, where he is linked to an aesthetics based on *partiinost'*, *narodnost'* and *klassovost'*,²¹ precisely the requirements Lukács set to the emerging new Hungarian literature in his other writings from the period as well. Once the Hungarian Workers' Party was established and the one-party system was on the horizon, Lukács demanded these requirements be met. When he took over the management of the Society for Hungarian Literary History, he stated in his inauguration speech that the practice of literary history should serve a sole objective: to help the aesthetics he described to emerge in contemporary Hungarian literature.²² This aesthetic was not difficult to identify with socialist realism, and contemporaries did so. The poet György Faludy, for instance, as early as 1947 read Lukács's efforts as an intrusive attempt to set up rigid guidelines for writers in order to enforce socialist realism.²³ While I agree with Melinda Kalmár and other interpreters of the cultural policy of this period that Hungarian communists aspired to carve out a space for a specifically national culture, setting Lukács's aesthetic theory in sharp opposition to socialist realism is misleading, and I believe this is a heritage going back to the 'Lukács debate', the design of which was based precisely on this opposition.²⁴ It is misleading because Lukács imagined this new culture to be created not *against* socialist realism, but *via* socialist realism. Considering the communicative tactics of the Party – in the design of which Lukács was directly involved – and the ever-clearer circumscription of socialist realist aesthetics (in terms of the mid-1930s), it does not seem an exaggeration to claim that there was a manipulative element in Lukács not using the term itself.

Révai and Lukács favoured a politics based on an alliance between workers and peasantry, who were to be joined by the 'progressive intelligentsia'. These visions were not only good as slogans, but in practice they had the advantage of being vague enough to leave considerable political room to manoeuvre for the HCP. And Lukács was all for being able to manoeuvre around ideologically and practically complex issues. Nonetheless, Party members wishing for a more straightforward and radical political agenda, even if they understood the reason for such tactics, did not sympathize with it, and Party leaders had a hard time controlling them. Both sides complained to the Soviets about the other. Stalin's administration initially ignored the criticism of the HCP's line by the Hungarian ultra-left, and even accused the Party's leaders of a leftist inclination, but when Soviet foreign policy shifted in late 1948, ultra-leftist voices gained more weight, and their complaints provided a pretext for the Soviet administration to accuse Rákosi and his coterie of a rightist inclination, for a change. This resulted in Rákosi's public self-criticism in January 1949,²⁵ and, as we will see shortly, led to public criticism of Lukács in the spring of 1949. The political price for practicing 'double-speak' from 1945 to 1948 had to be paid.

Inventing a Domestic Tradition of Socialist Realism: Avant-gardism versus Peasant Sociology

Highlighting the alliance between workers and peasantry as Révai and Lukács proposed had its consequences for the literary canon the HCP promoted. The communists were

eager to find or construct a literary tradition that could be branded as realist and presented as the national origins of socialist realism, in support of the claim that the latter was not a foreign import but fulfilled the genuine cultural needs of the Hungarian people. Carefully selected works by nineteenth- and early twentieth-century classics were cited in support of the argument that realism was the ‘main line’ and the ‘progressive tradition’ in Hungarian literary history. With regard to contemporary literature, the HCP highly valued authors such as Tibor Déry who did everything possible to ‘recover’ from their earlier avant-gardism and to become realist. Still, Révai and Lukács’s cultural policy in the post-war years at first prioritized the populist writers, an influential group of Hungarian authors deeply rooted in the sociographical tradition.

This politically and ideologically heterogeneous group included representatives of the most diverse professions, from poets to ethnographers. The common denominators included concern for poverty in rural regions and the anti-capitalist spirit that in some cases was complemented by emotional anti-Semitism.²⁶ Its members also tended to prefer folklore to urban culture. Still, the movement was diverse enough to have included, in the late 1930s, the poet József Erdélyi, who then became a member of the National Front, a Hungarian fascist party, as well as the peasant writer József Darvas, who had secretly joined the communists and remained an undercover member of the HCP in the post-war years while representing the National Peasant Party (NPP) and editing its daily *Szabad Szó* (*Free Word*). István Bibó, perhaps the most significant Hungarian political thinker of the twentieth century, also belonged to this movement. Throughout his career, Bibó remained a firm adherent of pluralist democracy and political (including ethnopolitical), social and economic emancipation, even at the cost of his right to work – as the regime, which was not particularly favourable to the plurality of opinions, forced him to retreat into ‘inner emigration’. Not only the more radical members of the movement but also those who held centrist views were still usually divided into those who had ‘left’ or ‘right’ sympathies (the Catholic poet and writer Gyula Illyés being the primary representative of the former group, while the Protestant writer and essayist László Németh was associated with the latter). For all that, the movement was characterized by a strong sense of solidarity that bridged these divides.

Révai and Lukács’s privileging the left-leaning populist writers over any other group of authors was not an entirely obvious choice, even if it had its prehistory, as I will discuss below. Hungarian culture since the 1930s had been characterized by the opposition between ‘urbanists’ (*urbánusok*), who were mostly leftist and liberal urban intellectuals with an affinity towards internationalism and cosmopolitanism, and the aforementioned ‘populist writers’ (*népi írók*), a supposedly grassroots intelligentsia, mostly of peasant origin, that tended to invest a lot of thought in figuring out what was authentically Hungarian. Adherents of ‘reformism’ – an intellectual-political trend associated with social democrats after World War II – and the avant-garde were largely recruited from among the urbanists, whom many populists identified with minority cultures of ‘foreign’ origin, predominantly Jewish and German. These two minority groups were overrepresented among the voters of the SDP. In their social origins and networks, a large proportion of communists were much closer to the urbanists than to the populists. Given the shared historical experiences and cultural preferences, it was often incidental who joined the HCP

instead of the SDP, or vice versa – many for the sake of simplicity joined both parties. Those coming from an urban intellectual milieu often found it difficult to stomach the HCP's support for populist writers, several of whom had been compromised by flirting with ethnic nationalism. However, in accordance with the communists' communicative tactics as explained above, the HCP's aim was to keep a distance from the SDP, which tended to be more outspoken when it came to criticism of nationalism, ethnocentrism, and the *ancien régime*. The social democrats were the primary competitors to the HCP on the political left: the communists wanted to make sure not to cater to their rival's cultural agenda and instead to distinguish themselves as the cultural-political alternative deeply rooted in a sort of national tradition that they cast as 'authentic'.

Condemning non-realist art was an integral part of the criticism of the SDP's 'reformism'. Having spent years in Germany, Lukács and other communist intellectuals – first and foremost the German–Hungarian bilingual playwright Gyula Háy, who returned from his Moscow exile to serve as a secretary for the Hungarian–Soviet Cultural Society – drew parallels between interwar Hungary and the Weimar Republic. Lukács and Háy agreed that in both cases not only the conservatives but even the political left were largely elitist, if not in their political ideals, then in their cultural preferences. They accused those mostly bourgeois intellectual 'fake revolutionaries' from 'artsy-craftsy Berlin pubs' of channelling revolutionary energies into a kind of art that had not only failed to mobilize the masses, but even paralyzed political resistance.²⁷ As is well known, Lukács held highly negative views of both the avant-garde and the *Neue Sachlichkeit*. In 1931–32, after he was sent back to Berlin from the USSR by the Comintern, he vigorously attacked both abstract art and factography,²⁸ which he saw as two sides of the same coin that equally missed the main principles of historical evolution, either by eliminating all details or by squeezing too many 'contingent' facts into the narrative, thereby distracting the reader.²⁹ Instead, in line with Stalin's letter to the editors of *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia* in December 1931, Lukács urged novelists to subordinate all details to the general plot of their novel, a feature that Lukács linked to realism in literature. As Katerina Clark demonstrated, this stance, grounded in Lukács's remarkable knowledge of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century German philosophy, secured his position as a major architect of socialist realism in the Soviet Union for several years in the 1930s, when he came to live in Moscow again after returning from Germany. After World War II, Lukács aimed to re-establish his previous agenda in the Hungarian context, building on the version of Stalinism that had gained momentum in the mid-1930s Soviet Union.

Such is the wider context of Lukács's fight against reformism. He compared the ideology of the Weimar Republic social democrats and their preferred aesthetics with those of the Hungarian SDP³⁰ and saw both as an identical form of sectarianism within the workers' movement that no politically conscious worker should follow. According to Lukács, the problem with the position of major SDP ideologues Pál Justus and Sándor Szalai was that they ignored dialectical materialism and treated politics in an 'abstract, formalist' way without considering the demands of a given political situation in a truly Leninist manner. Theoretical positions are not absolute but are conditioned by political circumstances, Lukács pointed out, and philosophical contemplation cannot lead one to the kind of revelations that only practice can provide. This is a conviction of the post-war

Lukács that many interpreters of his oeuvre tend to overlook. Political thought for him is, ultimately, a derivative of action, and therefore the collective wisdom embodied by the Party is always the highest form of knowledge, of a kind that no individual could live up to.³¹ This is why Lukács believed at this point that the Party's guidance was essential in every aspect of life, and centralization was justified. Accordingly, any discussion of political questions, he claimed, was to be subordinated to a political strategy, otherwise one was in danger of being trapped between a fatalist economic determinism and an empty ideological utopianism, between paralysis and actions that were pure varnishing.³² A literature informed by such an ideology, first and foremost avant-garde, would inevitably be elitist, unpopular, detached from the people and destructive; it would have no place on the literary scene.

Fighting reformism and the avant-garde, therefore, was of primary importance for Lukács, as he saw in them an immediate threat to the fate of the new type of literature and, ultimately, to the cause of socialism itself. The peasant sociographies of populist writers, in contrast, helped to frame an alternative tradition to be embraced and appropriated. No doubt, political pragmatism dictated that 'after the failure of the 1919 Commune [...] the one-party system cannot be introduced without the support of some spokesmen for the rural population'.³³ But it is equally significant that populist writers played an important role in the Hungarian version of national Bolshevism developed in Soviet exile by Révai,³⁴ who greatly relied on Lukács's thought in outlining his historical-political vision. Révai's take on the 1848 Hungarian revolution borrowed extensively also from a book by Gyula Illyés on the leading poet of national romanticism, Sándor Petőfi. Illyés had praised Petőfi for his recognition that the bourgeois revolution should have been taken further by involving the peasantry, and the same narrative was then developed by Révai, who depicted Petőfi as a quasi-communist poet.³⁵ Révai saw a potential 'new Petőfi' in Illyés who, as he thought, could embody the unification of the peasantry and the working class in a revolutionary effort to build socialism in a national form.³⁶ This same writer was also central to Lukács's version of the literary canon: he imagined that Illyés, the author of the sociographic novel *Puszták népe* (*The People of the Puszta*, 1936), would develop into a future 'Hungarian Gorky'.³⁷ The first post-war decade was marked by repeated efforts to guide, instruct and urge Illyés by all possible means to write a work that could be called socialist realist.

Lukács was, yet again, the one who outlined the requirements that populist writers would need to fulfil in order to develop into socialist realist writers. In his *Népi írók a mérlegen* (*Populist Writers in the Balance*) he expressed his view that the populists should be recognized as the interwar period's most significant literary trend, the realism of which could not fully blossom due to historical reasons: the unfavourable political environment prevented the members of this group from acquiring a *proper perspective* on history that is key to aesthetic creativity.³⁸ But in the people's democracy such obstacles had been removed, and the path was cleared for the populists to overcome their particularism, which sometimes had made them fall for the temptations of factography. Of course, some of their members could be accused of chauvinism, pessimism and a distrust of the masses. But were they to renounce such sympathies, Lukács argued, the movement had the potential to develop into a genuine Hungarian prose realism that had never really existed before.

This, in Lukács's view, did not require a retreat into critical realism as a transitional phase, but instead opened a chance for populists to advance at once to the forefront of universal literary development. He claimed that the populists' artistic achievements had been of a higher standard than that of the German writers of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* movement, meaning that their advancement could be quicker; in the populists' works one could recognize 'torn-up pieces, fragments of a new epos in formation: the awakening of the Hungarian peasant to new life'.³⁹ This reference to the epic character of their prose was the link that could connect the populists' novels with socialist realism. According to the theory of the novel that Lukács had developed in the Soviet Union in the early 1930s, socialist realist novels re-establish the epic at a higher stage of literary development.⁴⁰ As a synthesis of modern novel and epic writing, socialist realist works are truly collective products created by the people.

Indeed, what rendered the populists good 'raw material' in Lukács's eyes was their ability to channel folk creativity into their works: this guaranteed that they would not turn completely 'rootless', as had happened with the adherents of other literary trends.⁴¹ However, as Lukács pointed out, the populists' collectivist spirit was not that inspired by socialist ideas; rather, it sprang from their concern with the tragic fate of the people. But that also meant that if the people's fate was no longer tragic the populists would naturally have to renounce the tragic tone of their writings and any remainder of pessimism and, instead, dedicate themselves to celebrating the new democracy and its architects – otherwise they would inevitably lose contact with 'the people' and, consequently, would have to surrender their privileged position in the literary field.

Which is not to say that Lukács was calling for an eternal alliance of the communists and the populist writers, whom he saw as 'fellow travellers'. If anything, the opposite was true. As Lukács suggested elsewhere,⁴² his use of the term 'fellow traveller' meant that this temporary cooperation between the communist and populist writers, or in political terms between the HCP and the NPP, would naturally lead to a gradual self-liquidation of the populist movement. Sooner or later, the majority of the peasantry would turn communist, and proletarian workers and peasants would merge into one class of proletarians, represented by a united workers' party. For the populist writers it would mean that they would have to purge their own ranks. They would have to sacrifice the spirit of solidarity that bridges rival political agendas and re-establish their movement based on uncompromising political views. That would entail not only an expulsion of some members, that is, a purification of their community, but also a restructuring of the most fundamental principles on which they based their communication with each other – and with the world.⁴³ Taking the logic of this 'reinvention' to its conclusion, the populist movement would in practice simply need to acculturate to communist ideals and principles.

An Increased Vigilance: Communist Cultural Politics in Transition

From the summer of 1946, after Zhdanov took control of cultural issues in the Soviet Union and news was spreading about the future establishment of what later became Cominform,⁴⁴ all those active in Hungarian literature, however insignificant their status may have been, became the objects of increased attention from the communist authorities

and press. A new journal was launched under the direct supervision of Lukács and the experienced old guard communist György Vértess. Its title was characteristically misleading: the word *Forum* naturally led one to believe that it would be about dialogue and the exchange of ideas, while in practice the journal proved to be a primary medium of indoctrination, as was the 'Club Forum' – a meeting place run by the HCP, where writers were lectured on the new aesthetics. In September 1946, the first issue of *Forum* featured an essay version of Lukács's speech, entitled 'The Unity and Tasks of Hungarian Literature', which had been delivered some months previously at the Cultural Week in Debrecen. The text had been rewritten for the journal, reflecting both the debates that followed the presentation of the talk and the more recent political shifts.⁴⁵ The tone of the essay was more urgent than that of the majority of Lukács's publications from earlier that year. Here, he did not simply criticize writers for their 'aristocratic' stance in refusing to openly engage in politics, but went so far as to interpret this as a deliberate 'antidemocratic' attitude and, ultimately, a form of sabotage: 'They do not *want* to see the perspectives of the new life'.⁴⁶

Views opposed to this position, such as those of the avant-garde painter and poet Lajos Kassák, or the prominent literary historian Aladár Komlós (both of them leftist intellectuals), with whom Lukács argued and who had also participated in the Debrecen Cultural Week, did not have a place in *Forum*. This was because they had voiced their objections to such a twisted interpretation of democracy in which pluralism becomes anti-democratic. Not by chance, the month when the first issue of the journal saw light was also the month of the Third Congress of the HCP, whose participants discussed the socialist nature of the people's democracy.⁴⁷

This is not to suggest that as early as the summer of 1946 the HCP aimed at a direct repression of cultural initiatives that were in conflict with its aims. Doing this would have been beyond their powers anyway, since however strong their position in the governing coalition was, they were still significantly constrained by other political parties. The 'hard line' made itself felt primarily in various institutions that were under the direct supervision of the communists, such as the Ministry of the Interior, the communist press, the Hungarian–Soviet Cultural Society or other mass organizations. Furthermore, it is important to note that political pressure did not necessarily result in putting an end to cultural diversity; the communists were still mindful of the possible adverse results of such direct measures.

When Lukács, echoing Stalin's earlier criticism of Soviet writers, called from the pages of the *Forum* for more vigilance and encouraged literati to engage in a more intense struggle for the values of the new society, he effectively called for an open confrontation between various coexisting creative movements. With this militant spirit in the background, the HCP voiced no objections to the establishment of a series of new journals representing aesthetic views that rivalled those of socialist realism. To be sure, these periodicals were extensively criticised in the communist press, sometimes with moderation, sometimes with rigor, but their publication ceased only on the eve of, or not long after, the introduction of the one-party system.

It is likely that this seemingly open attitude reflected the views of a part of the HCP membership, but there is ample evidence to believe that the leadership manipulatively

adopted it for political reasons. It served to reaffirm the communists' claims that they were not pushing their own agenda by force, they were not about to introduce a dictatorship of the proletariat and there was no need to fear whatsoever. It was especially important to keep up this façade for as long as the negotiations over the World War II peace treaty were going on. The HCP wanted to make sure the Western powers would not have a reason to believe that pluralist democracy was seriously threatened in Hungary – otherwise the negotiations would have been affected. Western diplomacy had been rather ignorant of the true state of affairs in Hungarian politics, which suited both the HCP and the Soviets. Were Hungarian artists and intellectuals, with all their international connections, to voice a loud and clear protest, there was no guarantee that this state of affairs, fortunate for the HCP, would not have proven fragile. Another reason for HCP politicians to restrain their political enthusiasm and rhetoric was their concern about the possible withdrawal of the Red Army from the region once the peace treaty had been signed.⁴⁸ In February 1947, it turned out that the Red Army was there to stay, at least for the foreseeable future. Once this became clear, non-communist parties deemed it wise to avoid direct confrontation with the HCP, although sometimes there was simply no alternative.

The first half of 1947 was fraught with contradictions. In domestic politics the HCP, with the assistance of the political police and the direct involvement of the Soviet secret police fragmented its major rival, the Smallholders' Party, and either forced its most popular leaders into exile or had them imprisoned for treason and spying for the West.⁴⁹ At the same time, the HCP provided meticulously detailed instructions to its cadres on how to perpetrate country-wide electoral fraud that allowed them to score a victory over their fragmented and intimidated rivals in August.⁵⁰ In the media, however, they worked hard to compensate for such measures, and tried everything to convince voters and the West of the HCP's commitment to democratic pluralism. The propaganda machine was in full motion, sending carefully selected messages to specific target audiences.

Striving for Unity in Culture and Politics

After the August 1947 elections, which secured the position of the HCP as the leading political force, and following the establishment of Cominform the following month, the primary attention of the communists turned towards the SDP, the only remaining rival with any considerable power. The tactics were the same as in the case of the Smallholders' Party: the HCP tried to isolate the faction within the SDP that favoured Western, primarily Anglo-Saxon, contacts over a pro-Soviet orientation. It is no surprise that many social democrats were concerned about the communists building an 'intellectual ghetto' in Hungary, cutting off the country from the West.⁵¹ Having learned from mistakes they had made before the first free elections in 1945 and the resulting Soviet criticism, the HCP was cautious: even though anti-Western rhetoric intensified as changes were taking place in the international political arena, they still kept the Hungarian cultural sphere relatively open. Even when the master ideologues in the Soviet Union started juxtaposing 'the realism of the old school' and socialist realism,⁵² criticism of 'kowtowing to the West' had not yet become a primary feature of communist cultural politics in Hungary. Despite the famous 'Aleksandrov debate', the theories of Lukács, with all their references to Western

culture (and, in particular, to German idealism and neoclassicism), continued to define the cultural policy of the HCP. Lukács certainly contributed to the fact that Western realist writers were still held in very high esteem. However, the canon proposed by him was far from being the most inclusive one suggested from within the HCP. The much-feared communist critic Imre Keszi, for instance, who edited the cultural column of *Szabad Nép*, appreciated the works of Proust, and even Sartre and Joyce.⁵³ Echoing Lukács's famous thesis on Balzac, he claimed that Sartre's dramas are of value *despite* the playwright's reactionary political views.⁵⁴ Lukács himself, however, did not approve of this position, as he did not have a particularly high opinion of Keszi,⁵⁵ not to mention Sartre and Joyce.

The HCP's efforts to ensure a practical monopoly in governing the country by merging with the SDP had direct results for literary discourse. While previously Petőfi had been at the centre of the canon next to the post-Romantic poet Endre Ady, now he had to share the place of honour with the poet Attila József. The heritage of Petőfi, as already mentioned, was associated with the populist writers. József, however, was a more integrative icon: in the 1930s, he published both in the populists' journal and in that of the urbanists. An author of undisputable poetic talent, he was of proletarian origin, and even joined the Communist Party at one point. He may also have been an inconsistent, eclectic thinker with links to the far right, troubled by mental disorders, but he was still a good candidate for the role of a new national poet – with some adjustments to his image and oeuvre, which the communist critics were only too happy to effect. The new literary journal *Csillag* (*Star*), which was designed to become the central literary periodical of the country, started to publish a biographical novel based on József's life from its very first issue in December 1947. József was chosen as the new national cultural cult figure largely because he embodied all the social classes that had a privileged status in the new society. He could be taken to symbolize the working class because of his origins, the peasantry because of his association with the populist writers, and the 'progressive' intelligentsia because of his ties with leftist urban intellectuals. Shifting a focus onto him was a signal to the artists around the SDP: if they were willing to join the efforts for a 'unification' of Hungarian literature, they would not be left out; their tradition, too, would be acknowledged, and the populist writers would not be getting unconditional praise.

In the Soviet Union from January 1948 onwards the official cultural policy was becoming more and more anti-Semitic,⁵⁶ but in Hungary none of this was felt. The authorities were striving for unity in the cultural field, downplaying the conflict between the populists and the urbanists, at least on the surface. Anti-Semitism in the HCP was anything but uncommon,⁵⁷ yet at the time it was not allowed to infiltrate public discourse: it was clear that any suggestion to fight 'cosmopolitanism' would have lined up social democrats against the populists and the communists. This, however, did not mean that things were peaceful in the domain of literature. Far from it.

From autumn 1947 the tone of communist criticism changed – and that change was, yet again, reflected in Lukács's writings. In 1946 and early 1947 he still demonstrated a relative flexibility in treating cultural trends that presented themselves as alternatives to realism, if not in his shorter articles and reviews, then in his longer essays; this, however, was no longer true of the theoretical and critical texts that saw light from mid-1947 onwards and were later collected in his volume *For a New Hungarian Culture* (1948).

His lecture at the Political Academy of the HCP in April 1948 was one of the best indications of this shift. Here, Lukács employed metaphors of pathology to describe all those trends that did not fit the 'progressive tradition'.⁵⁸ Another new element was his insistence that the creation of a 'new man' was closely linked to the reforging of the Hungarian national character. In his earlier essays, he generally argued that the 'true' Hungarian national traditions were pointing in the right direction, and all that was needed was to emphasize these previously repressed trends a bit more. Now, this argument was not exactly dropped, but rather complemented by an additional requirement: to follow the Russian–Soviet models. Just as the passive Oblomov-like Russian national character was transformed once the revolution had been won, the same was going to happen in Hungary. The Party was going to raise the consciousness of the 'working people', introduce them to Marxism–Leninism, 'the healthy worldview', the new alternative to the 'old Hungarian ideology' that had promoted irrationalism, chaos and pessimism, and encouraged daydreaming instead of acting.⁵⁹ Both the rhetorical shift, with its emphasis on tropes of health and degradation, and the new emphasis on the radical transformation of the national character show the influence of Zhdanov, who at the time had just started the purge of formalist artists in the USSR.

The spring of 1948 brought with it a schism within the intellectual leadership of the SDP. Several 'urbanist' intellectuals, who would not let the populists retain a privileged position, saw no other way but to compromise with the communists. They supported the orientation towards the Soviet Union and the formation of a united workers' party, and it was not in the HCP's best interests to lose them as allies. With this in mind, the Political Committee of the HCP refused the proposal of the Cultural Committee led by Márton Horváth to centralize the management of the cultural field,⁶⁰ a view Lukács personally favoured. Instead, the HCP opted for promoting communist domination for the time being through the existing system of institutions. Some Western-oriented intellectuals – members of the SDP such as Anna Kéthly and Pál Justus – were suspicious of this 'doublespeak' and manipulative strategy, but they remained a minority, however strong. They were soon expelled from the Party and imprisoned.

In April and May 1948, in one of the last relatively free discussions on the pages of the SDP's daily *Népszava* (*People's Voice*), the literary historian Aladár Komlós in his 1 May 1948 article plucked up the courage to contest Lukács's contribution to the debate,⁶¹ in which the philosopher called for a rapid nationalization of publishing houses and for strict control over publishing programmes, arguing that once this had been done, the peasants' and workers' aesthetic tastes could be transformed 'surprisingly soon'. It was no secret what Lukács was hoping to achieve by means of such stringent measures: not long before this he had outlined his ideas for a textbook that was to be used at seminars for the instruction of cultural facilitators.⁶² Building upon his theories from the 1930s, he labelled naturalism, avant-garde and pulp fiction as kitsch, while Proletkult was criticized for being only a spontaneous revolt against conservative bourgeois culture. In his view only realism, in which he included socialist realism, made it possible to consciously undermine this bourgeois culture and create a new socialist man. In the spirit of High Stalinism, for Lukács tolerance was about letting every author 'willingly' adapt to the requirements of socialist realism which, in his opinion, guaranteed the greatest degree

of artistic freedom. In contrast, Komlós insisted that there was no single ‘-ism’ that could be ahistorically championed as the only style that would lead to the perfect society, and tolerance meant for him letting writers experiment freely.⁶³ His ideal was a diversified, heterogeneous literary field. Concluding the debate, the journalist Endre Sós, expressing the official opinion of the editorial board of *Népszava*, sided with Lukács⁶⁴ – a clear sign on the eve of the First Congress of the new Hungarian Workers’ Party (HWP) of what to expect after the unification of the HCP and the SDP in June 1948.

In *Szabad Nép*, which retained its status as the Party daily after the creation of the HWP, Lukács was assigned, yet again, the task of outlining the possible consequences of the Party’s new cultural programme.⁶⁵ But his analysis and suggestions did not meet with general approval, not even among the communists. The journal *Csillag*, which reached a much more limited audience, published an open letter from the writer Tibor Déry to Lukács following the publication of the latter’s proposal, and Lukács’s response. Déry had to be taken seriously: at that time, he was celebrated as a major communist writer, and had been active in the 1947 campaign representing a group of intellectuals supporting the HCP. At the end of 1947 he had given a lecture at the aforementioned Club Forum that met with a mixed reception: not everyone appreciated the prescriptive tone in which he spoke of the best way to create literature.⁶⁶ This time, however, even Déry was struck by the excessively stringent spirit of Lukács’s directives and considered it necessary to speak out publicly in order to distance himself from their exaggerated normativity.⁶⁷

There was nothing new in Lukács’s piece, except that now he expressed himself with increasing clarity when he described what was, in fact, socialist realism: the new literature should depict how the ‘new man’ is created, protagonists should not be individualized through negative traits but, rather, writers should set more positive examples, and a book should inspire optimism not by promoting sectarian values but by offering a vision of a beautiful future arising from the struggle between the old and the new. In his response to Déry, Lukács claimed that the major problem of literary life in Hungary at the time was not excessive normativity but the attitude of writers who refused to fight against their own bourgeois mindset: here, the philosopher was echoing the words of Mátyás Rákosi published earlier that year in the Cominform international newspaper *Tartós békéért, népi demokráciáért!* (*For a Lasting Peace, for People’s Democracy!*).⁶⁸

These were the months when Lukács’s political career in post-war Hungary most likely reached its peak. In October 1948, he gave a long talk on the occasion of his appointment as president of the Society for Literary History and the publisher of the prestigious journal *Irodalomtörténet* (*Literary History*). The speech that arguably defined Hungarian literary studies for decades to come called for ‘a complete and radical revision of Hungarian literary history’⁶⁹ and not only outlined general values and directions but also presented a relatively detailed agenda. Among the anti-democratic, reactionary scholars (meaning all those who did not exclude the possibility of pursuing scholarship in more traditional ways) he believed the clerical intelligentsia to be the most harmful, on a par with all Western-oriented intellectuals. The latter, he claimed, ‘consistently promote subjection to the Marshall Plan and American imperialism’.⁷⁰ From his point of view, scholars who were guided in their research by non-Marxist Western approaches manifested professional provincialism. In contrast, he sought to broaden the horizon of these

narrow-minded scholars by urging them to follow Stalin's teachings. For Lukács 'the proper essence of provincialism is that it puffs up superficial problems into something essential and blinds itself to the real questions of the time',⁷¹ and the only philosophy of history that could guide one in deciding what was 'essential' and what was 'superficial' was that of Stalinism. In general, history should be understood as the struggle between the old and the new, where emerging signs of a future communist society should have a much more prominent place than the methodology of an outdated objectivist bourgeois historiography would permit them to have. Party-mindedness was for Lukács a cornerstone in the writing of literary history: without it a pure detached professionalism would lead to undesirable results. This approach was in line with the activities of the Hungarian Scientific Council (HSC) that was established in September 1948 with the objective of revising membership requirements at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences so as to minimize the Western contacts of Hungarian scholars.⁷² The only two members who served on the Scientific Board and the Party Council of the HSC for the whole time this process was under way were Révai and Lukács. Their cooperation, however, did not last much longer: already in 1949 they had to face a rapidly changing political landscape that led to a spectacular break between them.

Socialist Realism without Lukács

By the time Lukács's paper on the revision of Hungarian literary history appeared in January 1949, significant changes had occurred on the international political scene. Eastern European political leaders were informed that Stalin believed in the ability of the people's democracies to fulfil the function of the dictatorship of the proletariat. The anti-Western spirit became more pervasive, ultra-leftist Hungarian intellectuals both in Moscow and in Budapest became ever more active. The criticism of Rákosi and his circle (especially of Révai, but also Lukács and Déry), inspired by the Soviet authorities, became harsher; they were now being accused of rightist deviations and of being seduced by both nationalism and cosmopolitanism.⁷³ The summer of 1949 saw the beginning of the infamous 'Lukács debate', which went on until 1950. A full analysis of it would require meticulous consideration of a series of political circumstances and cannot be presented here. For now, let it be pointed out that these events are usually seen in light of Révai's lengthy study that closed the debate, which was immediately translated into French and English. However, the problem with Révai's text is that he ascribed views to Lukács that the latter had not expressed. Lukács, after all, was not falling victim to 'rightist deviations'; as I demonstrated above, he was always responsive to changes in the Party line, to say the least. What was also remarkable is that, in discrediting Lukács, Révai was reinstating the key arguments of the very theories the philosopher earlier had been promoting. The debate, in fact, did not have as its aim a clarification of the substance of theories. Rather, its purpose was the introduction of socialist realism into Hungarian cultural life through a public event, an orchestrated campaign against one of the most important architects of Hungarian Marxist-Leninist literary studies. Predictably, the last section of Révai's essay deals with the question of producing socialist realist art in the most appropriate manner.⁷⁴

Lukács was no longer a suitable person for this new cultural policy, for at least two reasons, and neither of these has much to do with ‘rightist deviation’ in the sense that Révai understood it. First of all, Lukács’s broad, pan-European take on cultural and political issues was no longer required or even deemed acceptable. While the philosopher was responsive to policy shifts in both the Soviet Union and Hungary, he usually attempted to theorize the strategy of the day in a wider perspective that took into consideration the Marxist world outside the Sovietized region, and his interpretation of the history of philosophy and literature testified to such a broad-minded approach. He saw Marxism–Leninism and socialist realism as integral parts of European intellectual history, stretching as far back as the ancient classics and the Renaissance, with the German idealist tradition and the nineteenth-century French and Russian realist novel being at the origin of more progressive later developments. All of this was in line with the attempts undertaken in the USSR at the time of High Stalinism to re-establish the Soviet Union as the heir of European culture.⁷⁵ Mirroring the course of events around similar shifts in cultural policy in the Soviet Union,⁷⁶ the Hungarian authorities did not make Lukács vanish from public life altogether, but he was made to comply with the new agenda: in his speech at the First Congress of the Writers’ Union in 1951 he focused on Soviet writers.⁷⁷

The other reason Lukács was not a convenient presence in Hungarian cultural life of the time was directly related to the first, and it can be summarized as the philosopher’s propensity to use language that came to be seen as overly complicated. In autumn 1948, Rákosi launched a review of Party members’ backgrounds and activities in order to purify the new Party of former social democrats. By the time of ‘the Lukács debate’ in mid-1949, Rákosi had specifically called for the replacement of cultural cadres: those with bourgeois origins were to be replaced with new people, fresh from the Party school, the majority of whom had a working class or peasant background. For most of them Lukács’s prose was not accessible, which made the philosopher unsuitable for the role of a guide in matters of ideology. Aware of this criticism, Lukács did his best to use simple phrases when addressing the delegates of the 1951 congress. Even so, it was not enough to satisfy the new requirements that any politically reliable scholar had to comply with: apparently his hatred of the ideological enemies was not expressed passionately enough in his speech. And when complicated words were too much, emotions mattered more and more.

Conclusion

In Hungary, socialist realism was introduced gradually and not through a linear process. The initial period after the war was characterized by a series of contradictory measures: while the Party leaders with an experience of living in the Soviet Union were all for promoting a relatively consistent line in matters of cultural policy, based on a double fight against ‘ultra-leftist deviation’ and ‘reaction’, other members of the apparatus did not necessarily understand it or identify with it. Personal rivalry between mid-ranking officials as well as inconsistent guidance from the Soviet authorities further complicated the issue, especially with the HCP being restricted by the presence of other political

parties in the political arena. Then, from the autumn of 1946 to the autumn of 1947, things began to change within the Party and the institutions it owned or supervised, such as the Hungarian–Soviet Cultural Society, resulting in growing centralization and a more direct promotion of socialist realist aesthetics. However, it was only after the elections in August 1947 that the Soviet presence really started to have a direct impact on the situation in Hungarian letters. A series of celebratory events surrounding the anniversary of the October Revolution in the autumn of 1947 included publication of a wide range of Soviet literary works. At this stage, socialist realism was still by-and-large understood in a Lukácsian sense – the highest form of eternal realism. Although socialist realism generally failed to trigger interest among readers of any social background, and many intellectuals were concerned about the growing difficulty of maintaining contacts with colleagues in the West, by the time the HWP was established in June 1948 few dared openly question the HCP’s cultural policies. A growing dissatisfaction in Moscow with the slow rate of the changes, the break with Tito’s Yugoslavia and Stalin’s reinterpretation of the term ‘people’s democracy’ drove Rákosi to accelerate the cultural revolution in the country. This included a large-scale replacement of cultural officials with younger ones and a closer imitation of not only Soviet literary works but also the socialist realist critical idiom. The integrative version of socialist realism that linked historical realism to Gorky and contemporary Soviet literature, and that aspired for exclusivity at the expense of modernism and Proletkult, became untenable, and was replaced an even more normative version. The ‘Lukács debate’ in 1949–50 can be interpreted as a public demonstration of how this new socialist realist idiom could be learned, and as Lukács’s presentation at the 1951 Writers’ Congress demonstrated, in general the rite proved to be a success, however temporary.

And it was temporary, because writers, critics and literary historians learned to use this idiom in a way that allowed them to undermine it in the very act of employing it. They mastered the art of speaking with the required vocabulary and stock phrases, but a slight change of accent, a subtle shift of emphasis, ensured that their addressees understood their words in more than one way. The school of socialist realism turned out to be a good training in the art of coding and decoding, reading between the lines, and playing language games.

Notes

- 1 Gyarmati, *A Rákosi-korszak*, 58. See also Pushkin, ‘G. M. Puskinnek,’ 155.
- 2 Stalin instructed leaders of the HCP ‘not to be sparing with words, not to scare anyone. But once you gain strength you may press on [...] move as many people as possible who may be useful’. Quoted in Borhi, *Hungary in the Cold War, 1945–1956*, 35.
- 3 See Horváth, ‘Babits halotti maszkja’.
- 4 See Heltai, ‘Miért hallgatnak az írók?’.
- 5 Horváth, ‘Babits halotti maszkja’, 20.
- 6 Somlyó, ‘Jegyzetek’; Lukács, ‘Leszámolás a múlttal’.
- 7 See ‘Commentaries of artists to the article “Babits halotti maszkja”’, hereafter ‘Commentaries’.
- 8 P.Zs., ‘Lear király, Marsall, Ibolya’; P.Zs., ‘Ernst Toller: Géprombolók’.
- 9 Háy, ‘Goldoni a Ligetben’; Háy, ‘Öcskaság, unalom – és ami még annál is rosszabb’.

- 10 'Commentaries', 108.
- 11 Szegedy-Maszák, 'The Introduction of Communist Censorship in Hungary', 120–24.
- 12 Révai, *Lukács and Socialist Realism*. Interestingly, Révai's reading of this epoch is so compelling that it has been taken for granted ever since Eric Hobsbawm introduced the piece for a Western audience (see in the same volume). While the evaluation of Stalinists has turned from positive to negative, Révai's narrative has remained uncontested even by such admirably refined interpretations of the period as the one by Tyrus Miller, which bases its argumentation on Lukács's longer essays without considering his contributions to the daily press and non-public fora. (Miller, 'Editor's Introduction'.)
- 13 See Lukács's contribution, 'Minutes' 23. As agreed at the meeting, the term 'intellectual' was used not only with reference to the intelligentsia proper (in the French sense, which denoted writers and artists) but also in a broader sense that included, for example, 'postal clerks and stationmasters'. Cf. 'Minutes' 30.
- 14 See, for example, Gerő, 'Gerő Ernő tájékoztatója a magyarországi helyzetről', 67–68.
- 15 Rákosi, *Visszaemlékezések*, I, 325; 'Minutes'.
- 16 Stalin, 'The Foundations of Leninism'.
- 17 Lukács, 'Lukács György beszélt a kommunista művészek zeneakadémiai nagygyűlésén'.
- 18 For example, Lukács, 'Gorkij'. See also Szigeti, 'Lukács György újabb művei'.
- 19 For example, Lukács, 'Populist Writers in the Balance', 99.
- 20 Lukács, 'Gorkij'.
- 21 See, for example, Lukács's 'The Revision of Hungarian Literary History' or 'A kapitalista kultúra csődje' ['The Failure of Capitalist Culture'], an outstandingly illuminating essay prepared in late 1948.
- 22 Lukács, 'The Revision of Hungarian Literary History'. Right after Lukács assumed the position, the society's journal, *Irodalomtörténet* (*Literary History*), published in its first issue Lenin's *Party Organization and Party Literature* (1905) and Fadeev's *The Tasks of Literary Criticism* (1947), just after Lukács had delivered the speech. Ironically, the latter work inaugurated a normative conception that made any further attempts to reconcile historical realism with socialist realism rather difficult.
- 23 Faludy, 'A regény, a dráma és a közönség'.
- 24 For example, Kalmár, *Történelmi galaxisok vonzásában*, 62–63.
- 25 *Ibid.*, 59.
- 26 See Szegedy-Maszák, 'The Introduction of Communist Censorship in Hungary'.
- 27 Háy, 'Ócskaság, unalom – és ami még annál is rosszabb'; Lukács, 'Szocializmus', 311.
- 28 On Soviet factography see the special issue of the journal *October* 118 (Fall 2006), edited by David Fore.
- 29 Clark, *Moscow, the Fourth Rome*, 70–72.
- 30 Lukács, 'Justus Pál', 146–52; Lukács, 'Szalai Sándor', 676–80; Lukács, 'Szocializmus', 310–12.
- 31 See Lukács, 'Justus Pál' 149, 152 and 'Szocializmus' 311; see also Lukács's 6 January 1946 letter to Pál Ignóty.
- 32 Lukács, 'Justus Pál', 151.
- 33 *Ibid.*, 116.
- 34 See Mevius, *Agents of Moscow*.
- 35 Illyés, *Petőfi*; Révai, *Marxizmus és népiesség*.
- 36 Révai, *Beszéd az ideiglenes nemzetgyűlés*.
- 37 Lukács, 'Populist Writers in the Balance'.
- 38 *Ibid.*
- 39 *Ibid.*, 98.
- 40 Clark and Tihanov, 'Soviet Literary Theory in the 1930s', 116.
- 41 Lukács, 'Populist Writers in the Balance'.
- 42 Lukács, 'Szocializmus' 311.
- 43 Lukács, 'The Unity of Hungarian Literature'.

- 44 Békés, 'Soviet Plans to Establish Cominform in Early 1946'.
- 45 Lukács, 'The Unity of Hungarian Literature'.
- 46 Ibid.
- 47 *A népi demokrácia kérdései*.
- 48 Borhi, *Hungary in the Cold War, 1945–1956*, 124.
- 49 See Kenez, *Hungary from the Nazis to the Soviets*, 217–38.
- 50 Csöngé, '“Ahangsúly azon van, hogy ne tiszteljük a törvényeket nagyon.”'; Gyarmati, *A Rákosi-korszak*, 106–9.
- 51 'Szellemi elzárkózás?'
- 52 Dobrenko, 'Literary Criticism and the Institution of Literature...', 179.
- 53 Keszi, 'Irodalmunk a felszabadulás óta'.
- 54 Keszi, 'Tánc Sartre körül'.
- 55 Déry, 'Levél', 132.
- 56 Pinkus, *The Jews of the Soviet Union*, 151–54.
- 57 Ständeisky *Antiszemitizmusok*, 15–17.
- 58 Lukács, 'The Hungarian Communist Party and Hungarian Culture'.
- 59 Ibid.
- 60 Ständeisky, *A Magyar Kommunista Párt irodalompolitikája*, 135.
- 61 Lukács 'A népi demokrácia és az irodalom'.
- 62 Lukács, 'On Proletkult and Kitsch'.
- 63 Komlós, 'Népi demokrácia és irodalom'.
- 64 Sós, 'A népi demokrácia és az irodalom'.
- 65 Lukács, 'Milyen az optimista irodalom?'
- 66 See Füst, Letter to Unknown Correspondent.
- 67 'Az optimizmusról'.
- 68 Rákosi, 'A következőláncszem'.
- 69 Lukács, 'The Revision of Hungarian Literary History', 266.
- 70 This entire sentence is missing from the English translation, cf. *ibid.*, 277. See Lukács, 'Elnöki székfoglaló beszéd', 24.
- 71 *Ibid.*, 281. I slightly modified the translation based on the original.
- 72 Huszár, *A hatalom rejtett dimenziói*, 51–53; 65; 119.
- 73 'Az SZK(b)P KB Külügyi Osztályának...', 317–20.
- 74 Révai, *Lukács & Socialist Realism*.
- 75 Clark, *Moscow, the Fourth Rome*, 168.
- 76 Compare, for example, the 'Aleksandrov Debate'; see Pollock, *Stalin and the Soviet Science Wars*, 15–40. A Hungarian translation of Zhdanov's treatise on the topic appeared at the time of the Lukács debate; it was distributed as a complimentary copy for members of the Book Club: Zsdánov, *A művészet és filozófia kérdéseiről*.
- 77 Lukács, Speech, in *A Magyar Írók Első Kongresszusa*.

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